



By KLAUS MEHNERT

ON July 7, 1503, a man, prematurely aged and with a burning heart, was sitting on the desolate coast of Jamaica and writing a letter. What he saw was not reality as it surrounded him—the rotten deck of his stranded ship, his ragged, mutinous seamen. He felt neither the hunger in his bowels nor the fever and gout in his bones. For what he forced himself to see with all the ardor of his devout soul was the coast of an ocean never yet beheld by the eyes of a European and possessing gold and pearls in abundance. A decade was to pass before others fulfilled this vision and discovered the Pacific, and still more years before they were to conquer the treasures of the Aztecs and the Incas. But in his mind's eye Columbus already saw everything as clearly as if he need only reach out his hand to grasp it.

In his letter Columbus had described to the "Most serene, high and mighty Princes, King and Queen, our sovereigns" the experiences of his fourth and last voyage to America, which took him along the newly discovered coast of Central America. And now he was telling them of the wonderful things he had heard there, in Veragua: of the country of Ciguare, nine days' journey to the west and on the shore of an ocean. He wrote: "They also say that the sea goes round Ciguare, and from there to the river Ganges there are ten days. It seems that these lands are in a similar situation towards Veragua as Pisa to Venice," i.e., on the other side of a peninsula.

Columbus, steeped entirely in Ptolemy's and Behaim's conception of the world, believed himself to be on the east coast of Indo-China; hence it seemed quite natural to him that the other side of the peninsula should be washed by the *Magnus Sinus* (a part of the Indian Ocean), and that the Ganges should be a few days' journey further away. But we know today that these words of the discoverer represented the first news of the eastern shores of the Pacific Ocean to be

sent by a white man to the Spanish royal couple.

Without hesitation, Columbus covered the paper with the golden legend of Ciguare: "There, they say, there is infinite gold and the natives wear corals on their heads. . . . They also say that women there wear necklaces hanging from the head down their backs. . . . They also know pepper." He himself, he said, had not been in Ciguare. He was too ill, his ships too rotten. But even the Caribbean coast of Veragua offered enough treasures for the moment:

I sent seventy men inland; and within five leagues, they found many mines; the Indians who went with them led them to a very high hill, and there showed them all their eyes could reach in every direction, saying that in all of it there was gold, and that towards the west the mines stretched for twenty days. . . . In this land of Veragua I have seen more signs of gold in the first two days than in Española in four years, and that the lands of the country cannot be more beautiful nor better tilled, nor the men more cowardly, and good harbors and beautiful rivers and easily defended against the world.

All this was no surprise to Columbus; he had known it for a long time, for he was in the country of Aurea whence King Solomon had once obtained his gold! "I say that those mines in Aurea are the same and fit in with these ones in Veragua. . . . Solomon bought all that, gold, stones and silver; you can send there for it to be gathered if you wish."

The gold which Columbus had collected himself was indeed not worth mentioning—but for this, too, he had a noble explanation:

The gold . . . of the territory, though according to my information it be much, I did not think it seemly nor in good service to Your Highnesses to take it from them by way of robbery; an orderly behavior will spare [us] all scandal and bad reputation and will [in the end] bring it all to the Treasury, so that not one grain remains [behind].

The discoverer, living as he did in a world of imagination, entirely forgot the desperate nature of his own situation. Everything appeared to him in the most brilliant light, and the exploitation of the treasures of Solomon seemed a matter of certain-



ty. "Your Highnesses are as much Lord and Lady of this as of Jerez or Toledo."

Gold and pearls were not the only attraction of this fairy-tale country. He was already thinking of the future work of Christian missionaries. He, who was in reality the discoverer of a new continent, imagined himself to be on the coast of Marco Polo's "Mango" (South China) and close to the rich Mongol emperor—one and a half centuries after the Mongols had been driven from China! Removed from reality by 150 degrees of latitude and by as many years, he wrote:

I arrived in Mango province, which is next to that of Cathay. . . . The Emperor of Cathay long ago sent for wise men who might instruct him in the law of Christ [a reference to the request for Christian instructors to be dispatched to his empire, which the Great Khan had sent with the elder Polos]. Who will it be who will offer himself for this? I bind myself to take him there safely.

After almost a year of terrible waiting on Jamaica, Columbus was rescued and brought safely back to Spain in November 1504. But, without having seen his beloved "India" with its golden treasures again, he died on May 20, 1506.

A KING'S DECISION

Several years passed before the natives of Veragua saw European ships again. Spain had other worries. King Ferdinand who, a widower since 1504, was fighting for the inheritance of his consort Isabella and quarreling with the nobility, could not for the time being concern himself with the fanciful notions of a dead visionary whose golden promises had only too often disappointed him. But around 1508 he could breathe more easily in Spain and Italy. Through the death of his son-in-law, Philip of Hapsburg, and the lunacy of his daughter Johanna, he had become the undisputed ruler of all Spain. Moreover, he urgently needed money. The Caribbean islands were not yielding much income. Perhaps it would be worth while after all to look a little more closely into Columbus's golden Veragua and the ocean he suspected of lying behind that country.

At that time, the eastern contours of Central and South America were beginning to loom up out of the darkness of the unknown. The third and fourth voyages of Columbus and the voyages of other discoverers had shown that there was a closed coast line stretching for thousands of miles, at least from Honduras to the Rio de la

Plata. Little as one was conscious of the full significance of these discoveries, there could be no doubt that this land was not a group of islands but a mainland, a *Tierra Firme*. The Spanish King had no power over the eastern projection of this *Tierra Firme*, present-day eastern Brazil. The treaty of Tordesillas had allotted it to the Portuguese. But as for the parts allotted to Spain—Central America and part of the north coast of South America—Ferdinand now decided to open them to colonization. By the River Darien (now known as the Atrato River) he divided them into two provinces: New Andalusia, i.e., approximately present-day Venezuela, east of the river; and what was later to be called Golden Castile (Castilla del Oro), i.e., present-day Central America, west of the river.

Neither of the two governors appointed to these provinces by the King—the first European governors on the American mainland—were to play the role the King had intended for them. The Governor of New Andalusia soon had enough of starvation and poisoned native arrows. He abandoned the settlers placed under his care in San Sebastian on the east coast of the Gulf of Darien and died soon afterwards in Haiti. The other one, Diego de Nicuesa, tried in vain to settle in Veragua, and he and his companions were soon delivered up to starvation, disease, and embittered Indians in a place he himself had named Nombre de Dios.



The Isthmus of Panama in the Sixteenth Century

BALBOA TAKES OVER

The man who seized the reins in this situation in *Tierra Firme* and who stamped the whole future course of developments with his will was Vasco Nuñez de Balboa. Like many of his countrymen, he had come to the West Indian isles to seek his fortune. Like many others, he had made debts in-

stead. Finally he had become fed up with life as a planter in Española (Haiti) and had looked for a new start. But in order to be able to leave he had first to satisfy his creditors, and there was little prospect of that. So he smuggled himself as a stowaway on board a ship in which Martin Fernandez de Enciso was transporting additional men and provisions to the colony of New Andalusia. This is how Balboa came to the *Tierra Firme*. Enciso took over the leadership of the colony. However, it soon became apparent that he did not have the stuff in him to lead desperate men, cut off by shipwreck from the rest of the world, on the inhospitable beach of a strange continent. When he and the other officers no longer knew which way to turn, Balboa stepped forward with a proposal. He said :

I remember that some years ago we entered this gulf [of Darien], and in the direction of the west, on the right hand, if I remember correctly, we landed and saw a village on the other side of a large river [the Darien River], and the air was cool, and there was an abundance of provisions in the land, and the natives did not use poisoned arrows.

The men were only too willing to grasp the straw held out by these words. They crossed the gulf without bothering about the fact that they were now penetrating into another province, Golden Castile. They defeated a local chieftain, occupied his village, which they found well provided with gold and food, and erected a Spanish settlement which, in honor of an image of the Virgin Mary in Seville, they named Santa Maria de la Antigua, later shortened to Antigua. Enciso, who continued to claim leadership over the men, made himself very unpopular by his petty legalistic activities and was deposed in the first of those countless Ibero-American revolutions. Balboa was a sworn enemy of all jurists, and later wrote to the King :

I desire to ask a favor of your Highness. . . . It is that your Highness will command that no bachelor of laws nor of any thing else, unless it be of medicine, shall come to this part of the Indies on pain of heavy punishment which your Highness shall order to be inflicted, for no bachelor has ever come here who is not a devil, and who does not lead the life of devils. And not only are they themselves evil, but they give rise to a thousand law-suits and quarrels.

In place of Enciso, Balboa and Martin Zamudio assumed the government of the new colony. For ambitious Balboa it proved a disagreeable surprise when, shortly after he had got rid of Enciso, Nicuesa with his half-starved survivors arrived in Antigua

which, after all, belonged to his province. The chroniclers do not quite agree on the details of the ensuing events in Antigua. But there is no doubt as to the result: in March 1511 the party led by Balboa arrested Governor Nicuesa, put him and his followers on a worm-eaten ship, and forced him to set sail. Nothing was ever heard of him again.

In order to place the events in Antigua in a desirable light to the King, Zamudio was sent to Spain.

PANCIACO'S FATEFUL WORDS

Balboa, for the time being without a rival and determined to show his King that he was the right man at the right spot, enthusiastically undertook the subjugation of the country. Some two to three hundred men were at his disposal for this purpose. He made his advance westward along the Caribbean coast. In his campaigns Balboa combined extreme brutality with skillful diplomacy. It was his policy to intimidate the natives by flagrant violence, to take all their gold, and then to win them over to his cause in order not to leave any enemies in his wake on his further advances. In a blood bath he first robbed the chieftain Careta of many subjects and all his treasures; then he reconciled him and received from him a promise of alliance and, to confirm the pact, his daughter as a concubine. Then he penetrated into the country of the chieftain Comagre, who received him respectfully and delighted him with rich gifts of gold. During the distribution of the treasures, an argument arose among the Spaniards. Panciaco, the son of the chieftain, had been observing the curious actions of the white men and their lust for the yellow metal. Now he stepped forward. He contemptuously knocked over the gold scales and spoke the following words, quoted so often since then :

Why quarrel for such a trifle! Is it for this you leave your country, cross seas, endure hardships, and disturb the peace of nations? Cease your voracious brawl and I will tell where you may obtain your fill of gold. Six days' march across yon mountain will bring you to an ocean sea, like this near which we dwell, where there are ships as large as yours, and cities, and wealth unbounded. . . .

My father has an ancient enemy, Tubanamá, who lives beyond the mountains fronting the other sea. From time immemorial our people have fought his people; many have been killed on either side, and many enslaved. Could we for once bring low this hated Tubanamá, no sacrifice would be too dear. Be yours the gold; give us revenge.

The path is difficult, the enemy fierce. One thousand Spaniards are none too many successfully to cope with him. Prepare your army. I myself will accompany you with all the warriors of our nation; bind me fast; keep me in close custody; and if my words prove false, hang me to the nearest tree.

The report of a sea on the coast of Ciguare which Columbus had included in his letter from Jamaica was the first confused hint, Panciaco's speech the second, more concrete indication, of the eastern Pacific in the early literature of the Spanish discoveries. This was the very thing Balboa needed. Nothing was more likely to fortify his insecure position in the *Tierra Firme* than gold for the royal treasury and the fame of a discoverer. We know nothing of Balboa's geographical ideas; it is hardly to be assumed that he was much concerned with cosmographical speculations. He probably shared the common belief that the ocean on the other side of the isthmus was part of the Indian Ocean and that consequently the country of that chieftain Tubanamá must be in the vicinity of rich India.

A LETTER

Balboa returned to Antigua from this campaign with gold and highflying plans. But there were many reasons which for the time being prevented Balboa from carrying out his thrust to the golden coast on the other side. Again there were disputes to be settled among the colonists and battles to be fought with neighboring natives; again provisions were running short; again reports and requests had to be sent to Spain. But above all there were not enough men for the march across the isthmus. Panciaco had spoken of a thousand, and Balboa hardly had a hundred able-bodied men left at his disposal. In this emergency he wrote his famous letter of January 20, 1513, to the King. "Most Christian and Most Puissant Lord," he began his long epistle which had the double purpose of gaining Ferdinand's favor for himself and aid for the expedition he planned. He gave an impressive picture of the tremendous difficulties through which he had led his young colony ("We have valued a sack of corn higher than a bag of gold") and proudly emphasized his role as a leader ("Up to the present time I have taken care that none of my people shall go hence unless I myself go in front of them"). He described the effortless manner in which, according to what he had heard, the natives got the gold from the rivers, and told of a chieftain who "has a great place for melting

gold in his house, and he has a hundred men continually working at the gold." But Balboa did not want to divulge everything he knew at once: "I have news of many other things, but I will not declare them until I know them more fully." Yet he could not refrain from lifting a corner of his secret, and so he told the King about the coast with its wealth of gold on the other side of the mountains:

The Indians say. . . that the other sea is at a distance of three days' journey. . . . They tell me that there is such great store of gold collected in lumps, in the houses of the caciques of the other sea, that we should be astonished. They declare that there is much gold in very large grains in all the rivers of the other coast. . . . They say that the people of the other coast are very good and well mannered; and I am told that the other sea is very good for canoe navigation, for that it is always smooth, and never rough like the sea on this side, according to the Indians. I believe that there are many islands in that sea.

The following were Balboa's concrete proposals to the King:

The chief requirement is that a thousand men should come from the island of Española, for those who might come direct from Castile would not be fit for much until they were accustomed to the country, for they would be lost, and we who are now here with them. It is also necessary to provide the means of building small ships for rivers, and to send pitch, nails, ropes, and sails, with some master shipwrights who understand shipbuilding.

He ended his long letter with many flattering words for the King and signed with a flourish as "the making and creation of your Highness, who kisses your most royal hands and feet, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa."

At the time when King Ferdinand was about to receive this letter from Balboa, the reputation of the presumptuous conquistador was at its lowest at Court. Enciso, the deposed legal expert, had passed such withering judgment on Balboa, especially on his treatment of Nicuesa, that the King was infuriated, and Balboa's emissary Zamudio deemed it wise to disappear from Court as quickly as possible.

Then Balboa's letter arrived and rekindled Ferdinand's interest in the *Tierra Firme*. While the Portuguese had in the last few years been returning from their voyages to the East richly laden with treasures, the new Spanish possessions in the West had so far proved a disappointment. If Balboa was telling the truth—and the King was only too willing to believe him—a new age would at last begin. There was no time to be lost. Portugal was already knocking at

the door of eastern Asia and, according to the common conception of the world, thus approaching the *Tierra Firme*. It was imperative that a Spanish fleet should hurry troops to Antigua to take possession of the gold and pearl coast beyond the Cordilleras before the Portuguese could reach it from the other side. Of course, Balboa—so the King thought—was not the man for this job. He had received too many unfavorable reports about him. On July 27, 1513, he appointed Pedro Arias de Ávila—called Pedrarias in the chronicles of his contemporaries—to be Governor of Golden Castile.

LA MAR DEL SUR

In that summer of 1513, Balboa did not yet know that the King had wholly withdrawn his favor from him and appointed a successor. But through a letter from Spain, probably written by Zamudio, he was acquainted with the fact that his affairs stood badly at Court. He had to reckon with the possibility that the next ship might already demand his dismissal and arrest. His only hope for salvation lay in an achievement great enough to regain him the confidence of his king: the march to the other coast. Fortunately for him, 150 men and provisions had just arrived from Española. Balboa hesitated no longer. On September 1, 1513, he started out on his historic expedition.

During the years he had spent on the *Tierra Firme*, Balboa had accumulated a sufficient number of reports on the geography of the isthmus to know whence he would have the best chance for traversing it. With some 190 Spaniards and hundreds of natives, he sailed along the Caribbean coast to the country of the cacique Careta, doubtlessly because he knew that here the isthmus was especially narrow and because he could reckon on friendly support on the part of his father-in-law's tribe. It was from here that he began his march on September 6.

Traversing the territory first of friendly, then of hostile Indians, Balboa led his band under unutterable difficulties over the ridge of the Cordilleras. Some of his men were incapable of carrying on and were left behind on the way in an Indian village. One of the chieftains had told Balboa about a mountain from the summit of which one could see the ocean on the other side. It was this mountain which he was approaching with the handful of men still with him amounting to barely seventy. For the

dramatic events which now followed, and for the historic moment when the first European saw the Pacific from America, we shall let the chronicler Oviedo speak. Arriving nine months later in the *Tierra Firme* from Spain, he made use of eye-witness reports in his description, which we have translated below:

One Tuesday, the 25th of September of the year 1513, at ten in the morning, the captain Vasco Núñez, marching at the head of all those who were ascending a barren hill, saw from the top of it the sea of the south [*la Mar del Sur*] before any of his Christian companions who were accompanying him, and he, very happy, turned his face suddenly toward the people, raising his hands and eyes to Heaven, thanking Jesus Christ and His glorious Mother the Virgin, Our Lady; and then he knelt down on both knees on the ground and gave great thanks to God . . . And he ordered all of them who were accompanying him also to kneel and likewise give thanks to God, and they begged Him with great fervor that He allow them to discover and see the great secrets and riches which were in that sea and coasts, and they hoped for the greater glory and growth of the Christian faith and for the conversion of the native Indians of these southern parts and for much prosperity and glory for the royal seat of Castile and for the princes thereof, present and to come. They all did so very willingly and eagerly, and immediately the captain ordered a beautiful tree to be cut, and from that a high cross was made which was placed on that same spot and high hill whence that southern sea had first been seen . . . And he ordered also that all the persons who were with him should write their names in order that the memory of them be preserved, since they were the first Christians to see that sea; all of them sang that song of the glorious saintly doctors of the Church, Ambrosius and Augustine; a devout cleric, called Andrés de Vera, who was with them, also sang it with them with tears of blissful devotion: *Te Deum laudamus; Te Dominum confitemur*.

Balboa, fully aware of the historic significance of this moment, ordered a document to be drawn up regarding the discovery. In it, the name of the new sea, "*Mar del Sur*," found its first documentary expression. Balboa himself signed first, followed by Andrés de Vera, and in the third place appeared a name whose bloody luster was soon to outshine that of Balboa: Francisco Pizarro. The other 64 names followed in turn. Then the men descended to the sea.

He arrived at the shore at the hour of vespers, and the water was low; and he and those who were with him sat down and waited for the high tide because at low tide there was much and poor walking; and as they waited, the sea rose in the view of all, much and with great force. And as the water arrived, the captain Vasco Núñez in the name of the most Serene and very Catholic King . . . took in his hand a flag and royal pennant of their Highnesses on which was painted the image of the Virgin, Sancta Maria, Our Lady,

with Her precious Son, our Redeemer Jesus Christ, in Her arms, and at the foot of the image were painted the royal arms of Castile and León; and, with an unsheathed sword and a shield in his hands, he entered the water of the salty sea up to his knees and commenced to walk saying:

"Long live the most high and powerful monarchs, Don Fernando and Doña Johanna, sovereigns of Castile and León and Aragon, etc., in whose name and for the royal crown of Castile I take and seize the real and corporal and actual possession of these seas and lands and coasts and ports and southern islands with all thereto annexed and kingdoms and provinces which do or may belong to them in whatever manner and for whatever reason and title it may be, ancient and modern, of times past or present or future, without any contradiction. And if any other prince or captain, Christian or infidel, or of whatever law or sect or condition he may be, claims any right to these lands and seas, I am ready and prepared to contradict him and to defend in the name of the Kings of Castile, present or future, whose is this empire and the sovereignty of those Indies, the islands and the northern and southern *Tierra Firme*, with their seas, as also in the arctic pole as in the antarctic, on the one and the other side of the equinoctial line, within or without the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, according to which more completely all of this and each thing and part thereof belongs to their majesties and their successors, and as more fully in writing I affirm it will or can be said and alleged in favor of their royal patrimony, and now and in all times as long as the world shall last until the final universal judgment of all mortals."

While the first Spaniards thus stood on the eastern shore of the Pacific and laid claim to the whole ocean with Balboa's enthusiastic torrent of words, their Lusitanian cousins were fortifying their own position on its western shores: Serrão made himself indispensable in Ternate (Moluccas), and in Malacca the Portuguese were making preparations for their first voyage to the Celestial Empire. The thin but irresistible lines of Iberian expansion had reached the Pacific from two sides. It was only the width of this ocean that separated Europe from full knowledge of the circumference of the earth. In seeing the part of the Gulf of Panama which was within his field of vision, did Balboa perhaps sense that he was faced here by but a tiny part of the largest of oceans, which covers half the globe? Hardly. In view of the stage of geographical conceptions of his time, it is not likely that Balboa realized the entire significance of his discovery. The very name *Mar del Sur*, which he chose because at the point at which he had crossed America the range of the Cordilleras happened to run for a few hundred kilometers from west to east instead of its usual north-south direction, shows to what hazards his conception of the world was subjected. Thus today we accord a far

greater historical significance to his immortal achievement than Balboa could have foreseen in his boldest dreams.

Even our admiration for the purely technical aspect of his march has increased

in the same measure in which the isthmus has been opened up geographically during the last few decades. Although Balboa's sure instinct had led him to choose one of the most favorable points for his crossing of the isthmus, the difficulties offered by mountains, bogs, jungle, wild animals, disease, hunger, and oppressive heat were still gigantic. Not to mention the thousands of suspicious natives with which the isthmus swarmed and on whom the Spaniards had to rely for provisions and guides.

The next few months provided a series of adventures. Balboa explored a section of the Pacific coast. He obtained gold and especially pearls in large quantity. He saw the Pearl Islands from a distance and eagerly collected all information the local caciques could supply him with on his blue *Mar del Sur*. The chieftain Tumaco told him that the sea and the coast extended without end toward the south where, far, far away, there lived a great people of immeasurable wealth, which navigated the ocean and kept strange domestic animals. In explanation Tumaco modeled an animal out of clay which looked to the Spaniards like a camel but by which the cacique probably meant the llama of the Andes. Pizarro was probably present when the Spaniards were given this unmistakable reference to Peru, the future scene of his deeds.

On January 19, 1514, Balboa returned in triumph to his capital. Less than two months later, a man by the name of Pedro de Arbolancha was on his way to the King with gold, pearls, a letter from Balboa's hand, and reports on the discovery of the *Mar del Sur*. By these means the conquistador hoped to gain Ferdinand's favor and perhaps even his confirmation as Governor of *Tierra Firme*.

PEDRARIAS

For a few weeks the fate of America hung in the balance of chance. Had Arbolancha left for Spain immediately after Balboa's return, the King would have found out in



time that all the aims for whose sake Pedrarias was to sail to the *Tierra Firme* with a costly fleet had already been attained by Balboa at no expense to the state treasury. It is quite conceivable that Ferdinand would in that case have canceled the whole Pedrarias expedition and left the successful Balboa at his post. But Arbolancha did not leave Antigua until the second week of March, and so it came about that he was still far away from Spain when Pedrarias's armada sailed on April 11, 1514, to bring a new era to America.

When Arbolancha arrived at Court soon after with his important news and rich treasures, Balboa appeared to the King in a more favorable light than before. Ferdinand was faced by a dilemma. On the one hand, he had to ask himself whether it was right to judge so proven a man as Balboa by his former sins. Would it not be better to leave him, the specialist of the *Tierra Firme*, at his post for the greater glory of Spain and her King and as a spur to future discoverers? But on the other hand Pedrarias had already left and could not be recalled. The unfortunate compromise on which the King decided was to appoint Balboa "*Adelantado* [Governor] *de la Mar del Sur*" under Pedrarias without, however, any clear definition of his rights. He signed the necessary documents on September 23, 1514, but they did not arrive in Antigua until March 20 of the following year. Meanwhile, a lot of water had flowed down the Darien River there, and we must go back in our narrative to the summer of 1513.

The fact that Pedrarias de Ávila had held a high position at the Court of Castile and possessed the favor of Bishop Fonseca, who had the deciding word in American affairs, was due to the noble birth of his mother and his wife, his own activity, and the wealth of his Jewish grandfather. The date of his birth is not known; at the time of his appointment as Governor of Castilla del Oro he seems to have been in his sixties. The King must have placed full confidence in him and equipped him with far-reaching powers. Among other things, Ferdinand stipulated in orders dated July 24 and 28, 1513, that Balboa with all his companions was to be brought to trial.

Among the 1,500 men with whom Pedrarias put out to sea in April 1514 were many names which were to play an important role during the next few years in the history of the Pacific coast. But later generations

which were aware of ensuing events could only shake their heads in amazement when reading the long list of cavaliers of noble blood who, in total ignorance of the tasks awaiting them, set out here for the jungles of America. Of those 1,500 there was hardly more than a handful of men who were fit to be colonists and settlers. All the others voyaged to the *Tierra Firme* as if they were going on a chivalrous campaign against the King of France.

At the end of June 1514 Pedrarias's fleet cast anchor in Antigua. Several surprises awaited the noble gentlemen. Pedrarias found out that the main purpose of his expedition, the discovery of the ocean on the other side, had already been achieved six months earlier by Balboa; and his cavaliers, who had dreamed of spending their time with heroic campaigns, esteemed administrative activities, and the picking up of gold nuggets, were conscious of a chill feeling of dismay when they saw their own bitter future mirrored in the ragged, starving figures of the men of Antigua.

In all respects, however, matters went smoothly enough at first. Balboa handed over the administration without protest to his successor. In accordance with the royal command, his term of office, especially his behavior to Nicuesa, was made subject to an investigation. But Bishop Juan de Queredo—the first bishop on American soil—who had arrived with Pedrarias, persuaded the latter that it would be dangerous to send the deposed but still ambitious conquistador to the royal court in Spain. So Balboa remained in Darien.

RIVALS

This was not a happy decision. It did not remain concealed for long that the two men regarded each other as bitter rivals. It is easy to understand their feelings. Balboa had by the force of his energy opened up and subjected the *Tierra Firme* and from one day to the next found himself degraded from a leader to an inferior. Pedrarias, an old and ailing man, saw himself, in spite of his high title, in the shadow of the far younger Balboa, who radiated health and was intimately familiar with all the problems of Golden Castile. The ensuing months did nothing to reduce their mutual distrust. The enemies the impetuous Balboa had made could count on the willing ear of Pedrarias, and those who felt critical toward the new Governor knew that they

would always find an eager listener in Balboa.

There were enough reasons for discontent. The scarcity of provisions, in conjunction with the murderous climate and tropical diseases, killed off hundreds of the new arrivals. The supplies brought by the armada did not last long; the fields previously cultivated did not produce enough for the tremendously increased number of Spaniards and fell, moreover, victim to swarms of locusts. Within seven or eight months, the number of Spaniards had shrunk to half. As for the collecting of gold and the relations with the natives, things were also in a bad way. Pedrarias's men treated even those Indians allied to the Spaniards with such inhuman cruelty that many tribes were soon in open revolt and sought to outdo their enemies in barbaric acts of revenge.

While Balboa was thus watching his own future as well as his work in the *Tierra Firme* being delivered up to destruction, ships arrived from Spain on March 20, 1515, bringing provisions and the above-mentioned appointment of Balboa to the post of "Governor of the South Sea." Pedrarias now found himself in a difficult position. His in many respects superior rival had regained royal favor and had been appointed Governor of the Pacific coast, i.e., according to expectations the richest and most important part of Castilla del Oro. In his predicament, Pedrarias did the obvious thing: he tried to keep the King's order a secret from Balboa. He was not successful. The Bishop again took sides with the younger man and saw to it that the latter was handed his appointment.

The tension between Pedrarias and Balboa had now grown to be such a burden for the whole colony that the Bishop proposed an ingenious remedy: Balboa was to marry one of Pedrarias's daughters, who had stayed behind in Spain, and in this way build up a new relationship with the latter. The two rivals agreed to this proposal and made up. In a solemn ceremony, Doña María became Balboa's bride by proxy and he himself the son-in-law of his superior. At last the road seemed free to harmonious constructive work. By the end of 1516 all matters had been so satisfactorily settled that Balboa began with Pedrarias's consent to prepare his second expedition to the Pacific. He was drawn to his South Sea; and, since the expeditions made to the

Pacific coast during the last few years by Badajoz, Guzman, Morales, Pizarro, and Espinosa had revealed the great difficulties involved in marching along the coast, he intended to carry out his discoveries by ship. He made the curious decision to fell trees for shipbuilding on the Caribbean instead of on the Pacific coast, probably because he regarded the timber on the northern slopes of the Cordilleras as more suitable and because he wanted to make use of his period of waiting for the arrival of necessary reinforcements in the town of Acla, which had meanwhile been founded. His haste was caused not only by his own impetuosity but also by an agreement with Pedrarias.

The business of carrying the timber across the mountains to the upper reaches of a river flowing into the Bay of Panama was a tremendous one. Balboa's patience and endurance were sorely tested. Hundreds of natives perished as a result of the heavy work. A lot of timber got lost in the transportation; part of it was made useless by insects; another part was swept away by the river during a flood. Added to this there were diseases, stifling heat, lack of provisions—in truth, the first fleet built by white men on the shores of the Pacific was born in agony. But in the end Balboa's iron will triumphed. The first Spanish ships sailed down the river into the blue Pacific. On the Pearl Islands, Balboa established his headquarters for his future expeditions. The rest of his men followed, more ships were built, and the whole of the Pacific coast of America, with the gold of Peru and the pearls of California, was waiting to be discovered. Balboa seemed to be standing on the threshold of his greatest deeds.

THE FALL

During the years in which Balboa struggled first with Pedrarias and then with the Cordilleras, certain incidents had taken place in Spain which were to affect the further course of events. King Ferdinand had died in 1516. His grandson and successor Charles received more and more complaints against Pedrarias, chiefly over the revolting cruelty of his officers toward the natives, until the King decided to replace Pedrarias by the Governor of the Canary Islands. Although this appointment did not become official until the spring of 1519, rumors of the imminent change of governors reached the ears of Balboa on the Pearl Islands at the

very time when he was making preparations for his first long Pacific voyage, which might possibly have taken him to Peru.

Balboa was in a dilemma. On the one hand, he had long overstepped the time granted him by Pedrarias for his discoveries, thus incurring the latter's displeasure. On the other hand, his future under a new governor was very uncertain. Since he was determined not to be deterred from his voyage of discovery by anything, he figured out a plan by which he hoped to provide against both possibilities. He sent some of his followers to Acla to obtain information. Should they find that Pedrarias was still Governor, Balboa planned to carry out his South Sea voyage in spite of his time having expired, as he thought he could count on the subsequent indulgence of his father-in-law. Should Pedrarias, however, have been deposed, the messengers were to return with the trumped-up news that Balboa had been appointed Governor of *Tierra Firme*. In that case, his men would not hesitate to accompany him on his great voyage. And once he had returned from his expedition with gold and new discoveries, he hoped that—as in the case of his first discovery of the South Sea—his success would speak for him again and cause his disobedience to be forgotten. But things turned out quite differently.

Pedrarias nurtured a growing suspicion against his son-in-law, as he had heard rumors about an impending mutiny and had intercepted a letter in which one of Balboa's friends advised him to undertake his South Sea voyage without bothering about Pedrarias. The men sent to Acla were arrested. The conspiracy came to light. The Governor, who himself hastened to Acla, wrote Balboa a letter ordering him to come there

too. Balboa obeyed, perhaps because he was afraid that an open breach with the highest representative of the King in the *Tierra Firme* would deter his own men from further connections with him and from the voyage to the South Sea; he may also have hoped to be able to placate his father-in-law. On his way across the isthmus he met with a detachment led by Pizarro, who arrested him in the name of Pedrarias and took him back to Acla as a prisoner. On January 12, 1519, the legal investigation of Balboa's case was concluded. Upon the judge's question whether the case should be referred to Spain, Pedrarias replied in the negative. Thereupon judgment was pronounced: for high treason, Balboa and four of his conspirators were to be beheaded. A few days later, the sentence was carried out on the plaza of Acla.

The fact that Balboa was snatched from the midst of his historical mission had far-reaching consequences. Had he remained alive and in his position of *Adelantado* of the South Sea, he would probably have soon found the route to Peru. The history of the Pacific coast of South America might have taken a different course under him from under Pizarro. But just as he once deprived Nicuesa of the glory of discovering the Pacific, so was he now deprived by Pedrarias and Pizarro of the chance of discovering Peru. But even without Peru, Balboa is assured of his immortality. Pedrarias's behavior toward him is understandable both from a psychological as well as a legal point of view, but this does not make the figure of this suspicious, bitter old man any more attractive. In the opinion of Bancroft, the American historian, the two rivals were like the radiant Balder and sinister Loki of ancient myths.



Cop Copped

In Chicago, Patrolman Lynn Scott, author of a manual on the proper behavior of policemen, was arrested for attempting to sell stolen ration books.